

L'OFFICIELART

L'OFFICIEL ART

Claiming A Seat at The Table

Group exhibition, Them, brings together new generation queer painters fixing art history's absence of diversity.

06.20.2019

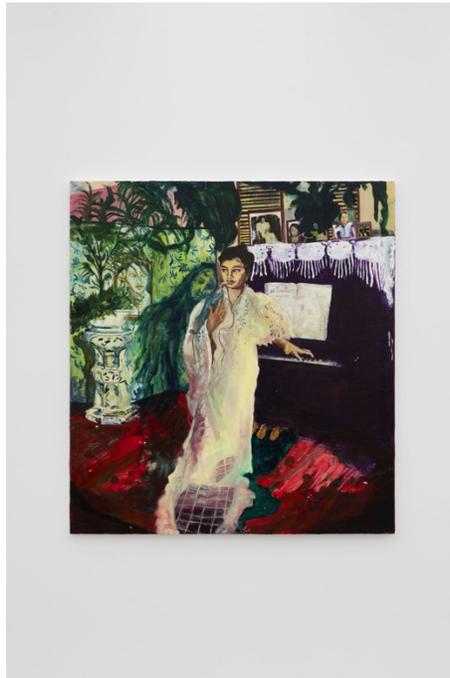
by Osman Can Yerebakan

"I thought of the people before me who had looked down at the river and gone to sleep beneath it. I wondered about them. I wondered how they had done it--it, the physical act," follows a line in James Baldwin's seminal 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room*. Art, similar to literature, brims with invisible, uncharted tales of resilience and ardor, bygone moments of intimacy and ecstasy. Another phoenix-like revival of figurative painting is spearheaded by a group of young painters, restoring historic absence of queer figures throughout the genre. Them, a group exhibition which opens today at Lower East Side gallery Perrotin, orchestrates thirteen painters fervidly rendering intimacy and repose, establishing men, women and non-binary subjects as protagonists of their own stories. In his two life-size paintings, Hernan Bas's signature detached, frail twinks peacock inside ornate barbershops, plunged into emotional and architectural excess. TM Davy's massive, wall-spanning painting, *Fire Island Moonrise* (2018), catches two elegant bodies awash in nocturnal light, in anticipation of the sunlight after a long night. Not myself but mixed with somebody (2019), Louis Fratino's painting of two entwined bodies, eclipses corporal thirst, capturing a moment of transcendence beyond limbs or genitals. His equally brutal and benevolent lines radiate intimacy in minuscule scale. Sholem Krishtalka's drawing, *Touch* (2019), catches lovelorn characters inside an asymmetrical frame to convey the dilemmas of heartbreak. In *Watching me paint* (2019), Jenna Gribbon leaves the male gaze out, capturing reciprocal stimulus she shares with her muse, with nipples pinker and a gaze more piercing than ever.

L'Officiel approached four artists from *Them*, which remains on view through August 16, 2019.

Doron Langberg's *Zach and Craig* series toys with rituals of sitting for a painter, putting both the artist and his subjects into an exercise on physical and emotional communication. Langberg painted his two models—a young couple—during sexual intercourse in their habitat, assuming the role of a photographer or film maker with his canvas and brushes. Observing their intimacy a step away behind his easel, the artist defies the ethereality of sexual intimacy and

meticulousness of painting. In one painting, a head devours voluptuous buttocks; another scene hints penetration. "Painting such a scene from life is far more intense and intimate, but also required me to work extremely fast," says Langberg, who will exhibit his mammoth scale paintings in a solo show at Yossi Milo Gallery on September 5th. "Responding to the moving bodies, I had to improvise." The challenge he imposed on himself yields tumultuous brushstrokes prompted by the immediacy of his subjects' magnetism and shifting contortions. The artist admits utilizing his imagination for his brushstrokes when the subjects' movements exceeded his hand's pace, prompting him to use mental memory of the moment and letting fluid abstract splashes bleed into his portrayal of two interlocked bodies.



Maia Cruz Palileo The Duet, 2019 Oil on canvas 183 x 168 cm | 72 1/16 x 66 in Photo by Guillaume Zicarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Maia Cruz Palileo's thickly-layered intricate painting of a woman holds an equally layered narrative, haunted by various other faces, potential reflections or ghosts of hers. The immense scale of her painting immerses onlookers into a living room, a common thread running through the show's many paintings in terms of catching subjects in their private moments of refuge. Palileo's woman dons a voluminous, white gown and holds a cigarette in her mouth, carrying that familiar expression of recovering from a long night. "The figures end up making themselves, with a sense of self possession and agency, and what surfaces in the finished painting is surprising," notes the artist about her rendition process of the subjects. She now paints based on archival photographs from the turn of the 19th century from the U.S. colonial era in the Philippines, after starting with her family photo archive for inspiration. Having trained with western painting techniques, she invests methods to subvert the canon's stubborn imagery of spaces, bodies, and scenarios. In her paintings, such as The Duet (2019) in this show, Filipino women take the center stage with strength and elegance within lush hues and possessions. On the miracles paintings can convey, Palileo is both fascinated and spontaneous: "Painting is

unpredictable, not pre-determined by categories or set rules about right or wrong—it's just paint and anything goes.”

Salman Toor's subjects claim spaces the way they emanate from his canvases, with grace and determination. Young brown boys and their occasional white friends, hook ups and those in between dance, flirt, contemplate and endure, existing in environments people of color have been systematically erased from in art history and elsewhere. They dwell in tree-lined Downtown apartments decorated with books and elaborate furnitures; they sip wine while checking their phones potentially in search of a connection; they prepare cocktails at parties brimming with radiant lights and zealous beats. The characters contain traces from Toor's own circle of friends, yet they refrain from referring to certain people or incidents. Instead, the boys experiencing the joy and pain of being young and beautiful endure times and places crowned by the bittersweet reality of the moment, freed from complications of everyday social contexts and possibility of unspoiled intimacy. “I'm going through a green craze. I think it's something about the glamor and poison of the color that is exciting,” says Toor about the prominence of green in his two paintings in the exhibition. Throughout his canvases, green defines the steamy air inside a club, the interior of a living room, and even the skin color of a handful subjects. “The compositions attempt to revise art history by giving dignity, sensuality, and humanity to queers and immigrants, whose bodies are only just entering the story of painting in this culture.” adds Toor.

“When a space or story doesn't look like you or the people you love and value, when a space or canon erases or aims to destroy you, then you need to make your own space,” explains Jonathan Lyndon Chase. Philadelphia-based painter has been slowly but diligently weaving a visual lexicon, a soon-to-be signature command over canvas with bodies that seem unfinished, awash with physical and spiritual possibilities beyond the visible. His Black bodies experience sex, wrestle with pain, and rise with glory, resisting the ingrained attempt to overlook their place in history and the present. Culling images from photography and his own memory, Chase paints intimacy the way dreams are remembered, making faint references to moments with stark precision—penises, anuses and buttocks continuously appear, yet as winding lines and curvy holes. Similar to Toor's, his subjects of color occupy spaces and narratives; they make love, relax, and defy the heteronormative gaze. Big muscular men wear lipsticks and grow beards, laugh at pain, and find solace in sex. “Bodies can be very nasty. Black Queer desire and lust is valid,” says Chase, and adds, “Feelings are not always clear, feelings are abstract.”